THE GAY CHRISTIAN

A journal of theological reflection from Metropolitan Community Church

THIRD QUARTER, 1980 $1

A letter from the editor

IN HIS IMPORTANT book by the same title, Jon Sobrino addresses what he calls "Christology at the Crossroads." A priest in El Salvador, Sobrino has in mind the human liberation issues, and their political consequences, facing people of faith in Latin America.

The feminists' prophetic critique of our faith tradition brings us to another crossroads in Christology. In this issue, Karen Ziegler addresses the dilemma in "Jesus According to a Lesbian."

The issues involved in our Christological crossroads are interrelated. The word of Sobrino in El Salvador, Cardenal in Nicaragua, and a host of other Latin Americans, must affect our Christology. So must the voices of third-world people among us. Like Renee McCoy. Her powerful piece, "Race and the Lesbian/Gay Community," also appears in this issue.

Both papers were presented at the recent Conference on the Future of Faith sponsored by this journal at Northwestern University, Chicago. Both were followed by animated and deeply reflective discussion. Allow us a few more words about that event. Feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether offered an analysis of entrenched and defensive patriarchy expressed as mysogyny among churchmen, even gay churchmen, particularly in those high-church traditions that continue to refuse ordination to women. She compared the dynamics of that phenomenon to homophobia, and, during her engaging three hours with us, traced a multitude of the implications of patriarchal domination, responding to a wide range of questions as though they'd been presented to her in advance. Joan Clark, fired by the United Methodist Women's Division when she came out and now Director of the Ecumenical Women's Center, Chicago, presented an outline of the New Right in religion. Workshops focussed on structure and community, sexuality, new forms of worship, struggling with the Bible, men's and women's issues and more. Participants shared times of centering, play, worship and music throughout. The weather and Lake Michigan water temperature couldn't have been more agreeable to our concluding picnic. If you missed the event, chances are we'll do it again!

Not that every minute of the conference was comfortable or fun. Besides the discomforting challenges to our present ways of thinking, feeling and acting involved in the presentations mentioned above, there were those moments of deeply personal statement; of anger crying out to be heard deeply and not just superficially; of frustrated hope hoping yet enough to set before us again a vision that may not, after all, be beyond our grasp. I cherish those moments too. Sometimes even more than the happy times, they mean hope. Hope hangs near our personal frontiers. Pushing those frontiers is rough, but oh, so rewarding. Chicagoans who participated in the hope-ful hurt needed Susan Savell's words, sung the following Sunday at Good Shepherd Parish MCC:

Hearts open slowly, so slowly
Unfold like the flower
Sing the songs of the dove.
Hearts open surely, so surely,
Milk and honey will flow
For the hungry to love.

Sometimes the slowly-opening hearts are our own.

We hope you, too, value the conflict occasioned by new visions of life-possibility and faith affirmation -- as they require us again to rethink, to feel and experience and reflect. If you do, TGC is published specially for you. If you haven't subscribed for yourself or a friend who'll value TGC, why not do so right now?

Next issue, we'll review some important new and not-so-new literature. There will be a review of John Boswell's long-awaited Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality. Steve Carson will review Elaine Pagels' The Gnostic Gospels. And by way of a review of Paul Spike's Photographs of My Father, we'll try to take another look at the disturbing murder of Robert Spike -- seven years after his son's engrossing biography.

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THE GAY CHRISTIAN is a theological journal of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. Its purpose is to build community among people of faith who happen also to be gay, women, or members of other sexual minorities by providing a theological soundingboard and relevant ecumenical news. **TGC** writers speak for themselves; their viewpoints do no necessarily represent any official policy, position, or doctrine of UFMCC.

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F. Jay Deacon, Editor

Editorial Offices:
615 West Wellington Avenue
Chicago 60657
(312) 472-8708

Circulation and Advertising:
Department of Publications, UFMCC
5300 Santa Monica Blvd./304
Los Angeles, CA 90029
(213) 464-5100

Contributing Editors: New York: *Karen Ziegler, Steve Carson.* **Boston:** *Edward T. Hougen.* **Washington:** *Larry J. Uhrig.* **Detroit:** *Jean Gralley.* **Los Angeles:** *Kenneth T. Martin, Donna .Wade.* **San Francisco:** *Michael England, Jeff Pulling.* **Long Beach:** *Dusty Pruitt.* **Milwaukee:** *Valerie Bouchard.* **St. Louis:** *Roy Birchard.*

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Beyond cliches:

A history of lesbian oppression

MARIANNE VAN FOSSEN

FOR MANY YEARS I accepted without question an oral tradition that tied the cause of lesbian oppression in the United States primarily to sexual preference and secondarily to gender. I believed simultaneously the cliches "we were burned at the stake" and "we were ignored." These apparently contradictory statements hold in tension the essence of the limitation of all women within Western androcentric hegemony. A historical analysis of lesbian oppression reveals this tension and inextricably ties the limitation of women's erotic options to all other restrictions imposed on women.

In her overview of Lesbian American History, Lisa Duggan points out that in order to understand the oppression of the lesbian in the United States it is necessary to examine the background of influences shaping the attitudes of the population. A complete study would therefore include an analysis of African, Native American and European tradition.[1] Since little information is available on African attitudes, and since both African and Native American cultures were drastically altered by contact with European culture, this survey will focus on Western attitudes towards women and lesbian practice.

Prior to the common era and the beginnings of Christianity, lesbian practice was either not taken seriously or ignored. Jane Rule in *Lesbian Images* states that while there is much evidence of male homosexuality in Ancient Greece, there is little direct evidence of lesbianism. Male same sex relations were considered the highest expressions of love in that they were not tainted by what the Greeks considered as the ulterior motive of reproduction. Heterosexual intercourse to procreate was performed as a duty to the state. However, Rule writes:

> What the Greeks felt about lesbian practice is not . . . well documented, except what can be pieced together of Sappho's life and work.

Rule feels that since the sexes were largely segregated and considering the evidence of Sappho's erotic attachments to her students in her school for women on the Island of Lesbos, "ancient Greece was obviously a bisexual culture" for women and men.[2]

In the Middle East, Rule reports that many countries viewed homosexuality as a matter of "taste and custom."[3] Male homosexuality was in some countries completely acceptable. Lesbianism in these extreme patriarchies was not a problematical phenomenon, since the choice of a woman for a woman was considered a lesser choice, expedient if no men were available.[4]

But Israel did not accept male homosexuality. Israel was a tribal nomadic nation longer than other ancient societies, and thus was more concerned with survival. Since fertility was thought to rest in the male, same sex relations between men were felt to endanger tribal survival, and were condemned as was "any strong pleasure which could distract people from vigilance."[5] Additionally, male homosexual practice was associated with various pagan cultures surrounding Israel, and against which the Israelites struggled to keep their territory and their identity.

But there are no laws against lesbian practice in the Hebrew Scriptures. Women were completely subjugated and indeed were chattel in Ancient Israel: Their behavior was not monitored by legal statutes except when it violated male property rights, as in the cases of adultery.[6] According to Rule, only in later rabbinical law are there found proscriptions against lesbian practice: "Male homosexuals were still stoned to death while lesbians were simply disqualified from marriage with a priest."[7]

Sodom and Gomorrah, used for centuries to legitimate persecution of homosexual men and women, was originally a story of "admonition against all sins of excess and idolatry as well as a moral explanation of the disaster of cities actually destroyed by earthquake and fire."[8] It was not until the second century BCE in other Hebrew writings that male homosexual acts became regarded as the cause of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. At that time, Hellenic culture was being brutally insinuated and "the Jews were again fighting to preserve their culture."

That Paul, in his concern for the spiritual and rejection of the sexual, included lesbian practice in the one possible New Testament reference to that activity is debatable given the ambiguity of Romans 1:26-27. However, early Christians were accused of immoral behavior that included male and female sexual expressions of love: Christian behavioral doctrine therefore became rigid, and "Jesus' doctrine of love became a doctrine of chastity."[9]

Medieval Christian attitudes on sexuality are rooted firmly in neo-Platonism. As McNeill points out in *The Church and the Homosexual*, "the early Fathers of the Church tended to accept the platonic and stoic body-mind dualism." The male principle, reason, is identified with the soul, and the female principle with the body. Women are subordinate to men in that reason is more spiritual, more pure, than the body. Women became responsible for the Fall, and Eve became the great temptress.[10]

Churchmen, concerned with women's sexuality, turned their attention specifically to lesbians. John Chrysthom

> thought lesbian practice even more disgraceful than homosexuality among men because women should have more shame than men, presumably because women were sexually responsible for the Fall.

That lesbian practice was formerly ignored is explicitly reflected in a letter from Augustine to his sister, a superior of a religious order:

Marianne Van Fossen is a student at Union Theological Seminary, New York, and an exhorter of the Metropolitan Community Church of Philadelphia.

> erotic play among women, before not taken all that seriously, must now be raised to the level of sin, not just for nuns but for lay women as well.

Accordingly, the Council in Paris of 1212 made it illegal for nuns to sleep together and demanded that lamps be lit all night as safeguards against this "erotic play" of women. [11]

Penances were developed since lesbian practice was now raised to the level of sin." Rule reports penances of three years for lay women and seven years for nuns.[12] D. S. Bailey describes the various Penitentials which were handbooks for confessors, and his discussion makes it obvious that men received harsher penances than women, and that many handbooks did not list lesbian practice.[13] However, what references exist do point out that Neoplatonic ideas of sexuality ended the relative silence surrounding lesbian practice.

That the silence was utterly shattered is exemplified by a legal code of Orleans, France written in 1260 which prescribes the following punishments for genital activity between women:

> The woman who does this shall undergo mutilation for the first and second offenses and on her third must be burnt . . . And all the goods of such offenders shall be the King's. 14

The church did not execute these punishments, the first of which was clitorectomy, but turned offenders over to the state for punishment.[15]

At the time of this law and much harsher ones against males, heresy was rampant in the church.[16] The most widespread heresies originated in Zoroastrianism, which according to Rule "was more tolerant of sexual behavior not associated with procreation."[17] Anything material, including the body, was evil. Not to procreate was to limit the amount of evil in the world.

Because of their attitudes, heretics were accused of various immoral acts. Indeed, "lesbian practice was associated with heretical belief." If the Inquisition's records are correct, many medieval women were lesbians. A truth test called the Judgement of God attempted to gauge the veracity of the accused by handing her a red-hot bar -- if she was lying, her hand burned.[18] But if the Inquisitors based their records on confessions gained in this manner, there is no way to determine who were lesbians and who were not. When the social order was threatened, as it was by the prevalence of heresy, a woman neither heretic nor lesbian could have been destroyed as such.

After raging against heresy and heretics, the church began its 13th through 18th century persecution of women as witches. While excerpts from the "Malleus Malefcarum," an inquisitor's handbook, do not directly refer to lesbianism, certainly the hysterical fear of women's sexuality described in this document deserves further investigation.[19]

As seen in this brief overview of Western lesbian oppression through the Middle Ages, lesbian practice was first ignored, and later declared sinful.[20] When that sin was linked to heresy or possibly witchcraft, lesbians were persecuted as a class. Any women who stepped away from the norm of religious belief could be persecuted: Unimaginably large numbers of women were tortured and murdered during the Inquisition and witch hunts.[21] Given methods used to extract confessions, many women confessed to acts they had never committed. All women destroyed were in a sense victims of lesbian oppression.

History is not to be tied neatly in a package. Certainly more research is needed in the areas mentioned if definitive correlations can be drawn between the stability of the social order and violent attacks on women. However, patterns do seem to emerge within even the small amount of information accumulated. Patterns of silence and horror that affect all women, silence when the social order is not shaken, horror when its peripheries tremble; silence and horror that traveled with this country's settlers and continues into the present.

Lisa Duggan describes the amount of available data on the colonial period succinctly: "The historical evidence pertaining to lesbian activity includes one law, one legal case and several cases of female transvestites."[22] The New Haven Colony in 1655 was the only colony to legislate against lesbian practice, prescribing the death penalty.[23]

Deborah Sampson in 1782 dressed as a man and fought in the Revolutionary War. Her true gender was discovered when she was treated for battle wounds. In a semi-fictionalized biography of 1797 Herman Mann suggests that she wooed her own sex during her transvestite period. Mann wrote that Sampson's activities were out of "sentiment, taste, purity; as animal love, on her part, was out of the question." Mann continues later

> . . . to mention the intercourse of our Heroine with her sex, would, like others more dangerous, require an apology I know not how to make. It must be supposed, she acted more from necessity than a voluntary impulse of passion, and no doubt succeeded beyond her expectations or desires. Harmless thing. An inoffensive companion in love!

While there is no way to prove the accuracy of Mann's suggestions, "their very existence in a book subscribed to by respectable New Englanders in the late 1700's is of interest."[24]

Sampson stepped completely out of her role by dressing as a man and fighting in a war. By so doing, she was suspected of lesbianism by at least one writer. The fact that Mann is moved to excuse Sampson, that he calls her activities "harmless" and that later he supports her and exonerates the women she attracted by writing that "she acted in the deportment of that male sex," illustrates the biographer's prejudice and chauvinism.[25] Sampson was sensationally accused of at least romantic pursuit of women, patted on the back for it as one of the boys because she acted like a man and men were to be emulated, her companions let off the hook because of course she acted like a man!

The only other reference Katz reports from the late 18th century is from Moreau de St. Mery, a French lawyer who lived mostly in Philadelphia, from 1793 to 1798. In reporting on mores in Philadelphia he writes,

> I am going to say something that is almost unbelieveable. These women, without real love and without passions, give themselves up at an early age to the enjoyment of themselves, and they are not at all strangers to being unwilling to seek unnatural pleasures with persons of their own sex. 26

Women who chose each other as lovers were not considered capable of real love by St. Mery. It was an insult to male superiority.

But male superiority was not totally shattered by the Passing Women of American History. Sampson as mentioned above is one of the first such women reported. Female transvestism in the United States is a complex life style. For some women, that life style was a feminist stance; for others, a form of economic survival; and for still others a method of coping with erotic preference for women.

Towards the turn of the 19th century, Murray Hall, one of the many women cited by Katz, lead completely the life of a male politician in New York City.[27] She voted, was married twice to women who carefully

guarded her secret, had marital troubles because of her flirtations with other women, adopted a daughter, drank and smoked cigars and was a bail bondsman.[28] What is fascinating besides the success of her disguise is the reaction of the men she knew when they learned her secret after her death. Those quoted in a 1901 *New York Times* article reveal more astonished respect than abhorence. A local politician comments:

> A woman? Why, he'd line up to the bar and take his whisky like any other veteran and didn't make faces over it, either. If he was a woman, he ought to have been a man, for he lived and looked like one.29

All the men interviewed seem to regard Murray Hill with similar respect. It seems that one who tries to be a man does not reject men so utterly as one who wishes to be a self-identified woman, and move outside of a preordained set of behavior.

While women remained within preordained sets such as marriage or father-controlled spinsterism, their relationships with other women were not monitored. Caroll Smith-Rosenberg, in her classic article, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relationships between Women in Nineteenth Century America," describes the intense relationships that existed between most women in that century. The nature of these relationships, she writes

> ranges from the supportive love of sisters, through the enthusiasm of adolescent girls, to sensual avowals of love by mature women.30

That women began to police their relationships and restrict their feelings for each other was sensed by Smith-Rosenberg who writes

> it is possible to speculate that in the Twentieth Century a number of cultural taboos evolved to cut short the homosocial ties of girlhood and to impel the emerging women of thirteen or fourteen toward heterosexual relationslhips. 31

No longer speculation, it is apparent that negative attitudes towards relationships between women became pronounced and were internalized by women at the end of the 19th century.

At that time, the oppression of lesbians and gay men had new champions -- European and American members of the medical profession. Punishment became treatment; homosexuality became an illness to be cured or controlled. Among the cures attempted were clitorectomy, hysterectomy, lobotomy, chemical-shock and electro-shock.[32] The words of these men echo those of medieval theologians. [33] For example the German clinician Kraft-Ebing in *Psychopathia Sexualis* believes

> every expression of the sexual instinct that does not correspond with the purpose of nature ie propagation must be regarded as perverse. 34

One of the pioneers of this field of study for doctors, Kraft-Ebing did not think there was much proof of homosexuality in women.[35]

Westphal, in 1870, is the first physician to deal with lesbians in detail, giving a case history of a lesbian transvestite he describes as a congenital invert, a term used at the time to describe homosexuals. Westphal insisted that "homosexuality was primarily and simply a biological phenomenon," and did not think it could be cured. He also, according to Rule, "identified a thoroughly feminine group of female inverts, which his colleagues did not recognize since their acceptance depended on evidence of inversion in secondary sexual characteristics."[36]

One of his contemporaries was Havelock Ellis, who felt along with Kraft-Ebing that there was a difference between homosexuality and homosexual acts. The invert was tainted with damaged genes yet at the same time was pathological. Female congenital inverts were considered seducers of the innocent, caused suicides, were murderers and were transvestite. They were all said to be masculine, even if that masculinity was only revealed in their pursuit of women. Women who were not inverts but made love to other women were considered normal in that the inversion would most certainly be dropped as soon as a man became interested.[37]

That women's relationships became suspect with the rise of feminism is very dramatically delineated by Nancy Sahli. Women's relationships were "subjected to increasing stress after about 1875." At that time

> prescriptions for female behavior changed; indeed a new definition of what constituted "normal" female relationships developed in both America and Europe.

She quotes the personal letters of Anna Dickinson between 1863 and the 1870's to illustrate this change. One letter from a woman to Dickinson reads

> You are mine, and belong to me until you get married -- say it's true. I have an irresistible desire through this letter to make love to you.

This type of correspondence and equally passionate replies of Dickinson become rarer as time progresses. Her letters in the 70's appear to be "rhetorically self-conscious rather than inordinately emotional in their language." This does not necessarily mean that her relationships changed, but that perhaps she was becoming self-conscious about their intensity.[38]

Both Faederman and Sahli discuss courtship rituals carried out by the majority of women students and teachers in women's colleges. [39] One woman, attracted by the physical form of the other, would send the object of her affection cards, letters, candy and flowers, etc. until the recipient was "smashed" or "had a rave." The first reports of the research committee of the early form of the American Association of University Women in 1885 included documents objecting to smashing, in that women were falling behind in their studies, mooning around, disrupting classes and being emotional over each other in ways that interrupted one woman's school work for an entire year.

This research was for a report on the *Health Statistics of Women College Graduates*. It was a response to a popular theory put forward by E. H. Clarke who in his 1873 book, *Sex and Education,* [40] said that not bearing children and concentrating on education caused "energy to be deflected from the womb to the brain," which caused "acute or chronic diseases." One such disease was the "hermaphroditic condition that sometimes accompanies spinsterism" as an "Amazonian coarseness and face." He compares educated women to the "sexless class of termites." The report proved Clarke wrong by showing statistically that women's health was not impaired by education. [41] However, the early researchers did not put their findings on smashing in the final report: Emotionalism was found to be detrimental to the development of rational skills in young women.

These intense relationships among young women also attracted the attention of Havelock Ellis, who cautions

> conventional propriety recognizes a considerable degree of physical intimacy between girls, thus at once encouraging and cloaking the manifestations of homosexuality. 42

That women's sexuality was receiving a great deal of attention in this period is dramatically indicated by the first two editions of the *Index Catalogue of the Library of the Surgeon General's Office, United States Army*. In the series published

between 1880 and 1895 there were 30 books and 100 articles on inversion. In contrast, the series published between 1896 and 1919 under the category women had several sub-headings referring to sexual instinct. Sexual instinct (inversion of) had a listing of 36 books and 228 articles, and sexual instinct (perversion of) had a listing of 26 books and 300 articles.

That inversion was linked to feminism is explicitly seen in the work of Ellis who felt, according to Sahli, that

> lesbianism is a highly contagious disease to which feminists and other independent, autonomous women are particularly susceptible.

Similarly, the author of the preface to the Henry James novel about the feminist movement *The Bostonians* published in 1886 lists the characteristic of the novel that upset him most as "the emotional economy of the Lesbian woman." According to Sahli, lesbian practice is not mentioned in the novel. She writes

> Thepoint is not whether the women were really lesbians, but that they were called lesbians on the basis of their autonomous behavior. 43

Many factors contributed to the existence of new pressures on women's behavior. Emphasis on rationality and what Sahli tantalizingly refers to as an "intense religiosity" on the part of many Suffragists that led them to "define their love for women as a spiritual force," contributed to

> the feminist movements own subversion of the heightened emotional commitment which had typified women's relationships for most of the 19th Century.

Feminism, on the rise and growing stronger in this half of the 19th century drew the attacks of doctors who "assumed roles of definers and arbiters of the acceptable and desirable." [44] As the system was threatened by feminism, the empowering relationships were controlled.

***

Duggan points out that prior to the end of the 19th century there was no concept of "homosexuality but rather only specific sexual acts which any person might commit which were forbidden and punished." [45] Kraft-Ebing, Ellis and others were the originators of ideas of lesbian practice as a pathological or congenital trait. The move from sin to crime to illness caused lesbians and gay men to be classified for the first time. Focusing on lesbians and gay men as an "effected" group created a climate whereby class consciousness became possible. [46]

Accordingly, lesbians and gay men are allies, a special class. Since on the surface it appeared that both men and women were persecuted for genital activity, gay men's history became lesbian history. Similarly, anything male was thought to be universal; men's circumstance became women's circumstance. The contradictory cliches "we were burned" and "we were ignored" are both true, but we were not burned as gay men were burned. Gay men's persecution is primarily based on their genital activity, in that their sexual expression involved a lowering of status that insults male superiority. Lesbians were both burned and ignored because we were women. Given our common oppressor, the Western androcentric hegemony, we share much with gay men. For lesbians to refuse alliance with gay men, given the commonality of oppression, is as divisive as lesbians refusing alliances with women who enjoy heterosexual privilege.

The amount of debate engendered by Smith-Rosenberg's article on whether the relationships she describes were lesbian is indicative to me of the devastating results of male society's reactions to those relationships when they became a source of empowerment for women. Smith-Rosenberg urges that these relationships, while homo-social and homo-erotic, should not be labeled with 20th century psycho-sexual terminology, but rather viewed strictly in the context of their culture.[47] On the other side of the debate are those such as Blanche Weisen Cook who would name many of these relationships lesbian, her definition of the term being

> women who love women who choose to nurture and support and to create a living environment in which to work creatively, are lesbian.48

Cook's definition redefines lesbians as woman-centered women, regardless of genital activity.

If such activity was the chief source of lesbian oppression historically, then Cook's definition would be irrelevant and one would be forced to search continually for evidence of genital contact. But this contact was not the ultimate focus of oppression. It was only when women in general became viewed as evil and thought to threaten the social structure that lesbianism became a sin, as seen in the analysis of European traditions above. Male homosexuals were and are persecuted for genital activity consistently, but women are persecuted only when the patriarchy is threatened by changes in women's behavior.

Similarly, while further research is needed, there seems to be a connection between the decline of feminism in the first decades of the 20th century and the policing of women's relationships. When women's source of empowerment became suspect, women became divided in their relationships and isolated from each other. This polarization of women into lesbians and non-lesbians was created by theories of congenital inversions that continue to divide women.

To call oneself a lesbian is a political act. Women who are not lesbian, or who do not claim the lesbian part of their identity enjoy heterosexual privilege. For the latter, privilege is exchanged for wholeness and honesty; stability for risk and uncertainty. To refuse alliance with heterosexual or bisexual or closeted women is to ignore our common history. While lesbians need space and time together, perhaps we need to be cautious about how we isolate women who share our vision but not our motivation or courage.

This survey does not tell our story; it tells the story of what happened to us, and why. We would prefer to ignore that story, but we are better able to confront that which would deny or destroy us if we understand its tactics. Our strategies informed by history then can move beyond reaction to attack.

But we need to know more than when we were burned, why we were ignored, or how we have been divided. We need to hear of the laughter that ripples through time, the tenderness, the passion of love. We need to know about relationships that empowered, about women who fought bravely a monolithic structure. We need to recover our past, to unstop silenced voices. It is to this work I now turn my attention, having gone beyond cliches and examined a history inseparable from the history of all women.

FOOTNOTES

1 Lisa Duggan, "Lesbianism and American History: A Brief Source Review." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies.* Volume IV, No. 3 (Fall 1979), p. 81.
2 Jane Rule, *Lesbian Images.* (New York: Pocket Books, 1976), p. 15.
3 Ibid., p. 16-17.
4 Ibid., p. 17.
5 Ibid., p. 18.
6 Phyllis Trible, "Women in the Old

Testament." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Supplementary Volume. Edited by Keith Crim, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), p. 964.

7 Rule, pp. 18-19.

8 Ibid., p. 19.

9 Ibid., p. 21.

10 John McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual*. (New York: Pocket Books, 1976).

11 Rule, p. 22.

12 Ibid., p. 23.

13 D. S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Tradition*. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1955), pp. 100-110.

14 Bailey, p. 142.

15 Rule, p. 23.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., pp. 23-24.

18 Ibid, p. 24.

19 E. Clark and H. Richardson, editors. *Women and Religion*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 116-130.

20 Homosexual acts continued to be regarded as sinful and punished by law through the Reformation. Unfortunately, sources examined are not specific about attitudes against lesbian practice in this time period.

21 Clarke and Richardson, p. 116.

22 Duggan, p. 81.

23 Jonathan Katz. *Gay American History*. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), p. 23.

24 Ibid., p. 212-213.

25 Ibid., p. 213.

26 Katz, pp. 25-26.

27 Katz, p. 232.

28 Ibid., p. 232-233.

29 New York Times, Jan. 19, 1901.

30 Caroll Smith-Rosenberg. "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America," *Signs*, 1, No. 1 (Autumn 1975), p. 2.

31 Ibid., p. 27.

32 Katz, p. 129-130.

33 Ibid., p. 131.

34 Quoted in Dolores Klaich, *Woman Plus Woman: Attitudes Toward Lesbianism*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 40.

35 Rule, p. 34.

36 Ibid., p. 35.

37 Lillian Faederman. "The Morbidification of Love Between Women by Nineteenth Century Sexologists," *Journal of Homosexuality*, 4, No. 1 (Fall 1978), p. 79.

38 Nancy Sahli. "Shashing: Women's Relationships Before the Fall," *Chrysalis*, No. 8 (1979), p. 18.

39 Faederman, p. 84; Sahli, p. 21-22.

40 Sahli, p. 21.

41 Sahli, p. 22.

42 Ibid., p. 25.

43 Ibid., p. 25.

44 Ibid., p. 26.

45 Duggan, p. 81.

46 Further research is needed that would trace the development of this class consciousness in lesbians and gay men.

47 Smith-Rosenberg, p. 2.

48 Blanch Weisen Cook. "Female Support Networks and Political Activism: Lillian Wald, Crystal Eastman, Emma Goldman," *Chrysalis*, No. 3 (1977), p. 48.

Jesus according to a lesbian

KAREN ZIEGLER

THERE ARE FOUR observations I would like to make to begin with. These are things I learned during the weeks I was trying to write this paper. First, we must be aware that there is no more difficult theological issue for lesbians than Cristology. There is also no more threatening issue for those who are already threatened by women in the church. Every time I sat down to write this paper, I wanted to scream and run out of the room. The issue is frought with anxiety and pain.

Second, I discovered as I was talking to some sisters about this paper that we often begin at the wrong place. When we are trying to figure out how it is possible to be lesbian and Christian at the same time, the tendency is to begin with definitions of "acceptable" Christianity and try to fit ourselves into these. Actually, we need to start at the opposite place, with what it means to be a lesbian, and figure out from there whether the church is an acceptable way for us to spend our time. We are primarily accountable to the lesbian community, to our sisters, *not* to the church.

Third, to understand the particular relationship of lesbian women to Jesus, we must understand that we are struggling very hard for our lives. Lesbians simply do not "belong" in a patriarchal culture. We defy the most basic assumptions of our culture every day simply by being ourselves and remaining alive.

Finally, I felt as I was writing this that I was speaking out of a vacuum. We have no history of the survival of our fore-sisters, and this is one of the most difficult problems of all. We remember Radclyffe-Hall and Gertrude Stein who survived by acting as much like men as it is possible for women to act. We remember the women who were burned for witchcraft in the Middle Ages who did not survive at all. The only history we really have is the history we are presently creating together.

At a time in history when finally we are carving out for ourselves and our sisters a fragile existence, we do so at great risk. Simply by being self-affirming lesbians in community we are doing a new thing. We are literally making up this journey as we go along, and we have no idea where it is leading us. We find ourselves in new and exciting and scary places. At the same time, the threat we perceive is very real. Our support systems are invisible or nonexistant and have no economic base. It is a miracle to me that we survive at all as women-identified, women-loving women. We are up against an overwhelmingly male language and male-centered culture. It is a death-seeking and woman-hating culture.

Lesbian women have traditionally had a "place" in the Christian church only by "virtue" of the stripping away of our sexuality, our minds, our loyalty to our sisters and our very selves. It is actually extremely difficult to understand why a lesbian would be at all interested in a

religion in which the most popular words are "Father" and "Son." It is difficult to understand why we involve ourselves in a church which claims to "save" us because the fact is that on the whole, the church has systematically destroyed us. Now, it is easy to understand why the church has found it necessary to do this. By loving ourselves and other women in a primary way, we threaten the very foundation of patriarchal religion. Mary Daly describes the trinity as follows:

> *It is 'sublime' (and therefore disguised) erotic male homosexual* mythos*: the perfect all-male marriage, the ideal all-male family, the best boys club, the model monastery, the supreme Men's Association, the mold for all varieties of male monogender mating. To the timid objections voiced by Christian Women, the classic answer has been: "You're included under the Holy Spirit, He's feminine." The point is, of course, that male made-up femininity has nothing to do with women. Drag queens, whether divine or human, belong to the Men's Association. 1*

It should be clear by now that gay men stand in a very different relationship to Christian language and symbolism than lesbians do. Gay men, men who love men, have every reason to feel perfectly comfortable with all-male imagery. So comfortable can they feel, in fact, that one sometimes finds even in MCC newsletters touching little stories about meeting Jesus in a gay bar, cruising him, and perhaps bringing him home. Could pictures of a nearly nude Jesus twisted in agony (or smiling in rapture) on a torture cross actually feed male sexual fantasies on a subliminal level at least. And what does all this talk about blood have to do with sadomasochism?

If the language and the images are not enough to prove my point, try the hymns. They, too, are constant assurance that men loving men is natural and holy. Evangelical hymns especially tend to be love songs to Jesus and abound in erotic language and imagery. This may make sense to heterosexual women as well as gay men. But for lesbian women they amount to a kind of sick joke.

Jesus lover of my soul, let me to thy bosom fly. Thou, O Christ, art all I want; more than all in Thee I find.

My Jesus, I love thee/I know Thou art mine.

Jesus, my King, my wonderful Savior/ All my life is given to thee/Thy precious blood now makes me free.

Have thy way, Lord, have thy way/this with all my heart I say/I'll obey thee, come what may/Dear Lord, have thy way.

Who can cheer the heart like Jesus/by his presence all divine?/True and tender, pure and precious/Oh, how blest to call him mine.

Let Him have His way with thee. His power can make you what you ought to be. His blood can cleanse your heart and make you free. His love can fill your soul, and you will see/T'was best for him to have his way with thee.

The Savior is waiting to enter your heart/ Why don't you let him come in. 2

Jesus is all the world to me.

Another hymn begins, "I have one deep supreme desire/that I may be like Jesus/to this I fervently aspire." It ends, "My deepest prayer, my highest goal, that I may be like Jesus." A woman is led to wonder what this means, especially in light of the 1976 Vatican declaration that women bear no natural resemblance to Christ and, therefore, cannot represent him as priests. This sort of double message, in which the church abounds, causes women to feel crazy. (One of the most essential things women can do for each other is to continually remind each other, "You are NOT crazy.")

Amazing as it may seem in the face of all this, many lesbian women have a profound and meaningful relationsuip with Jesus. Where these relationships have enabled our wholeness rather than our destruction, they have happened in spite of the church. I believe that traditional Christology, including the prevailing notion of who Jesus is in MCC, are destructive to women and especially to lesbians. The church has defined Jesus in a way that has required us to surrender our identity and our integrity in return for marginal respectability and acceptance. The catch-22 for lesbians in the church can be clearly stated. What it means to be a lesbian is to value oneself as a woman and to love women. Our survival and our spiritual strength depend absolutely upon our refusal to be primarily identified through any male, whether divine or human or both. I cannot call Jesus my "Master" or my "Lord" because the very point of my being as a lesbian is that no man is my master and no man is my lord.

This is the reason why the church is not the place to go, on the whole, to find women-identified lesbian community. It is also the reason why lesbians in the church are sometimes very angry and may be perceived as unreasonable or heretical. The slow dawning of our understanding of what it means to be a lesbian in the Christian church has brought us to an understanding that our spiritual survival may depend upon our rejection of traditional theology, particularly traditional Christology. I believe that this is one of the signs that God is alive in the church today. The way we are learning to perceive Jesus is important not only for lesbians but for all women and equally for men.

It has been said that "The basic problem with Christianity is that Jesus is male." On the surface this appears to be true, and I have said this myself. Now I think that the problem with Christianity is not Jesus at all, but the way in which the church has committed idolatry by the worship of Jesus, his name, his blood and finally, his maleness. The problem is not that Jesus was a human male, but that the church has paid so little attention to his humanity. The problem is that shortly after his lifetime women began to be categorically excluded from all decision-making processes and priestly functions of the church. Carter Heywood writes,

> *"It has been* despite *the most vocal articulation of dogma, worship and discipline within our traditions, that many women have begun to believe that Jesus Christ is not what he has been cracked up to be. Indeed, he is even more remarkable than we had realized. More remarkable, more helpful, because he is more truly human than he has been made out to be in orthodox - both catholic and reformed - christology." 3*

The disobedience of the church to the vision of Jesus of Nazareth is astonishing and it is made clear by simply reading the Gospels. Jesus lived as an openly radical teacher and healer. He told the poor that

the Common/wealth of God belonged to them. He raged at the religious leaders of his time, trying largely in vain to make them see that they did nothing to lessen the oppression of their people. For three years he traveled among the poor, the outcasts, the demon-possessed, the unpopular, the lepers - and surely - the lesbians and gay men. He healed everyone who was in need of healing; even the slaves of his oppressors. He deplored war and greed and death and the legalisms or religious authorities. He captured the imagination and the trust of thousands. They followed him everywhere in huge crowds, hoping to touch even the hem of his garment. No one was too young or too old or too black or too female to be accepted by him. He spoke *good news* - which was bad news to those who were offended when people were healed and freed and laughed and knew love. Those who experienced Jesus and his good news as bad news had organized religion and the government on their side. It was an easy thing to put him to death.

For those who had heard the good news, Jesus' death and later their deaths and even the utter hopelessness of fighting city hall was not enough to stop the abundant life they had learned. Even today, in rare and unexpected places, the good news is shared and celebrated. But it was not long after Jesus' death that his name came to belong to the religious authorities and governments. Many were put to death in the name of Jesus. There were the rapes and murders of the Christian Crusades. There were the millions of women (many of whom were healers, like Jesus) who were burned as witches. "Faggots" served as fuel for the flames. Slavery in this country was condoned by the churches and still now racism is alive and well and often supported by the name of Jesus.

It was only forty years ago that eight million Jews were put to death. As Rosemary Reuther has shown, the Holocaust was the culmination of anti-Jewish sentiments within Christianity which dated back to the New Testament. The cancer of anti-semitism grew throughout the history of the church, nurtured by orthodox Christology. Reuther says that anti-semitism is the "left hand" of traditional Christology. She writes,

> *"Christ is the incarnation of God's Word. It is through the Word that the world was created, all the Scriptures revealed, and God's creation providentially directed. It follows, then, that the Jews, in not receiving Christ, do not and never have received God's Word, and have never known God through their Scriptures, since these Scriptures are revealed through God's Word." 4*

And yet Jesus himself was a Jew. It would appear that lesbians are not the only people who find themselves in a catch-22 position in relationship to traditional Christology. This may in fact be one of our most helpful points of identification with Jesus.

In any case, it is the arrogance of traditional Christology which allowed the Holocaust finally to happen. It is in memory of the Holocaust as well as the more invisible murders of my lesbian sisters that I protest the choice of the theme for the 1982 UFMCC General Conference. It is Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name . . . (than the name of Jesus) by which we must be saved."

I insist that the name of Jesus is not the point at all, and this can be seen by the fact that the current political right in this country is virtually identical with the Christian right. Billy Graham, Jerry Falwell, Anita Bryant and Ronald Reagan are very comfortable with their salvation in the name of Jesus. In that name they fight against the ERA, abortion and homosexuality. In that name they would have us go to war, and this time the Holocaust will not be limited to Jews or blacks or women.

Nuclear waste is already out of human control, and nuclear power plants continue to be built. Most of the planet is Third World, and most Third World people starve. The next presidential election in this country may well assure the rise of repression and facism at home, and more imperialist aggression abroad. Reagan promises yet more bombs and armies, and registration for the draft began again in July. Our love songs to Jesus do absolutely nothing to stop this death.

And now, the good news. People everywhere are slowly learning that the path to life is the healing and valuing of our bodies and our earth. Third World people are on the move everywhere in the world, and it is not a moment too soon. The women's movement is, without a doubt, here to stay, with or without the ERA. Women in lesbian communities are learning to physically heal ourselves and each other. We are learning that everything is connected. We are learning the meaning of real power; the power to love the earth and ourselves; the power to empower one another; the power to heal.

It is clear that we live in apocalyptic times. The lines are being drawn unmistakably and the forces of life and forces of death are fighting in some clearly recognizable though convoluted issues. The choice of where we stand as a church is before us and we make that choice whether we are conscious of deciding or not.

It is clear to me that Jesus is present today where there is healing, where there is an understanding of the connectedness of all things, where there is love for our earth, ourselves and each other - and where there is a struggle to survive with justice and dignity for all people. Jesus is friend, colleague, brother and teacher. He is certainly fully human and fully divine - but only as we understand ourselves to be fully human and fully divine.

As Beverly Harrison has pointed out, there are only two ways to use the language and symbols of the church at this time in history. Either we can reinforce the status quo, or we can blow it wide open. 5 No other choice exists. We must not overestimate our importance, but among other things, the survival of this planet depends upon the willingness of those in various churches to use Christian language to blow the status quo apart. This requires fearless rethinking and radical re-vision of our ways of speaking about God and Jesus and ourselves.

In conclusion, I want to share an experience I had with Jesus. My therapist sometimes uses what she calls faith imagination with her client. She has them imagine the presence of Jesus as a way of healing memories or sickness. Now I was very cynical about this. One day I decided to see where this method might lead me. I had been struggling very hard with my relationship as a lesbian to Jesus. I had reached a point of pain where I felt I had to do something to try to work it out. My therapist's instructions were simple. "Just close your eyes and imagine that Jesus walks into the room." I felt cynical and uneasy, but I closed my eyes and my imagination took over from there. I imagined that Jesus walked into the room and sat down cross-legged beside me on the floor. I told him how angry I was at the atrocities committed daily in his name. I talked to him about what worship of the god "Father" has done to the planet and said after all it was he who first called God *abba* "daddy." I told him this and more

and soon I was crying with all my being.

And soon I was aware that he was sobbing, too, as deeply as I, and the words which came to me from him were, "Yes. You are right. I see it, too, and I never thought it would be like this." We cried for a long time and it was clear, although unspoken, that if either of the two of us were going to speak against the atrocity, it would be me and not him. It was also clear that I was not alone.

We are the voices and hands and the bodies through which the vision of Jesus of Nazareth must come alive. We, like him, may be tried for heresy by churches or killed by governments. Certainly the governments and religious authorities are not on our side. We should not find that at all surprising.

FOOTNOTES

1. Gyn/Ecology, Boston: Beacon Press, 1978, p. 38.
2. Worship in Song, Lillenas Publishing Company, Kansas City, MO, 1972. No. 37, 241, 105, 235, 58, 94, 367, 44.
3. Unpublished sermon, UTS, Nov. 8, 1978, p. 5-6.
4. Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism, Seabury Press, NY, 1974, p. 162.
5. Eastern Ministers Conference, Toronto, June 21, 1980.

RACE AND THE LESBIAN/GAY COMMUNITY

RENEE McCOY

HOW DOES ONE approach the topic of race and the Lesbian/Gay Christian without sounding bitter? How does a Black Christian Lesbian address white Lesbians and Gay Christians about the racial situation in UFMCC without sounding or feeling like one is begging for yet another handout of kindness from yet another white institution? Without feeling like yet another request is being made for God given human rights, for respect for God given human pride and dignity? How can I keep from feeling like I'm crawling on my knees to the base of a white painted totem, carved with faces resembling days of my past?

My dilemma when putting this together came down to: How to not guilt trip, not attack, not sound militant, be received lovingly, influence people to positive action, keep their attention, make them feel my love for them, help them understand my oppression, sound and be Christian and tell the truth at the same time.

I decided that the best I could do would be to be as simple as possible. My understanding of life comes through simple dealings with life. Our survival in this life, too, I believe, will come through an array of simple actions. So much of our past has been cluttered with very real complexities of race and Christianity. Most of the time the complexities with which we involve ourselves in efforts to understand the racial situation clog our pores so much that we can never be free and flexible enough to clean ourselves all over.

So I will begin by sharing with you my own simple understanding and impression of RAce and Christianity as an issue in UFMCC: UFMCC does not include a ministry to Third World people. Theoretically, UFMCC is a Christian Church open to all. Practically, however, UFMCC is a white Lesbian and Gay Church controlled and governed by white people, building structures that are inclusive only of themselves and their whiteness, calling themselves Christians seemingly for the accountability the word lends to their struggle against a homophobic society.

Now, many may disagree. For those who do, I remind you that this is my impression of UFMCC. Let me also say that I do not believe that the bleakness of this image will remain. My belief in and hope for change is what keeps me clinging to UFMCC. And, I draw an abundant amount of strength and energy from the openness that is being born throughout this fellowship. Still this is my today impression of UFMCC. Those who disagree may say this is a strong and untrue image. They will say that Third World people are just as welcome as anyone else. Others who disagree may do so not because my image is untrue but because it's unfair. They are the ones whose questions are: What are we doing wrong? and What can we do? Those are the two questions I will seek to answer simply in this simple presentation.

The answer to what is UFMCC doing wrong is 1) we bring white racial attitudes, values and behavior into the mainstream of UFMCC operation; and 2) there is a basic blindness throughout UFMCC to Third World oppression, evidenced by UFMCC's lack of involvement in a liberation process for Third World people.

I need to address each of these answers repeatedly. The first, bringing white racial attitudes, values and behavior into the operation of UFMCC, is perhaps easier for me to understand. Before whites realized they were Lesbians or Gay they were in touch with the special-ness of their whiteness. Family and educational conditioning subtly and blatantly brought everyone to believe that white was better, white was privileged, white was powerful, white was right. Look out for number one was the battle cry, and everyone knew who was number one. Through the use of stereotypes, language, media, educational institutions, the Church, etc., the concept of white superiority was maintained. Included in this concept was the belief, implied or stated, that white lifestyles were the only valid ones.

Lesbians and gay men, after such lengthy exposure to such conditioning, perhaps believed that their sexual lifestyles were not in complete violation of the American Dream unless they were not basically white. It's sort of like as long as whatever you do does not conradict your whiteness there is still a change for rightness. For this reason, white Christian Lesbians and gay men still refer to Blacks as niggers, tell racial jokes and build all white institutions "for whites only." For this reason liberal white Lesbians and gay men judge Third World people as worthy of their love and acceptance only if they change and become more like them. They must speak good standard American English, have a better than average job, at least three white friends (preferably none of which are lovers), be well educated, upwardly mobile, live in a ranch house, have two cars and 2.3 children. Because the values learned in white heterosexual communities become affixed to those whites embracing Lesbian and gay lifestyles, UFMCC does not even approach ministering to Third World Lesbians and gays and continues to remain

Renee McCoy is Assistant Coordinator of the Northeast District, UFMCC, and Chair of the UFMCC Committee on Racism.

a white institution waving a banner of
Christianity.

LOOK, SEE YOUR SISTER

So you, sisters, brothers, white
say you love me,
want to be for me
a supportive community
to me
a Christian community
want to decrease my anguish;
want to stand by my side
in my struggle
offer me a Church home
united in the Body of Christ
build a Kingdom
where we're all united
in Christian fellowship.
Sisters, brothers, us all.

Well,
there's a few things first you must know
a few things first you need to know
my lesbian and gay
Sisters, brothers us all.

If this thing is going to work
we have to be real clear
about who we each are.
I was raised to know you
taught to understand you
more than myself;
conditioned to be more you
than to be myself;
conditioned to accept your life
as a state better than my own
taught to aspire to be you
while grappling with the reality
of life's impossibilities
which sought to negate
the possibilities of my own reality.

Well, you,
Lesbian/Gay Christian, white
Sisters, brothers, us all
must know
that I am
in spite of 400 years of work to make me you
that I am not
nor will I ever be
you.

You,
Lesbian/Gay Christian white
must know who it is
that your faith calls
you to accept/welcome/reach out to

I am all
of who I am.
I am Black as the night
I am red as Georgia clay
brown as roasted coffee
yellow as a sun rise
and various shades of them all.

I am the one
you provately call nigger
chink, spade,
the Indian of giver,
the black of black balled
while you
are the white of lie
the white of white washed.

I am the punk kid
the hoodlum
the young rowdy

I play my music loud
I hang out in the parks
I laugh at silly white folks
I smoke dope on the streets
I drink wine on the stoops
I talk loud on the subways
I don't speak English so good
I wear bright colors
My food is greasy, starchy and smells funny.

Do you still want me?
Are we still going to build a Kingdom?
Are you still with me?

I walk around the streets
in the day time
playing disco on my radio
loud.

I call my woman "baby"
soft and low,
strong and mello.

I call a mother fucker
a mother fucker
I call a white son-of-a-bitch
a white son-of-a-bitch.

I am the "them"
and the "those people"

They are me
and I am them

I'm the one you worry 'bout
raping your sister
The one you take classes
to defend yourself
against.

Are you still with me?
Is there room for me
in your pews?
your supportive community?

I call my woman
my woman
I call myself
her woman
and we make love
every chance we get
fiercely, flamboyantly
without asking each other
what does this mean
to the revolution?
what does God think?
(we know, you know)
without first deciding
if this is politically correct,
or theologically sound;
without giving a damn
whether our passion
is anything more
than a good feeling
(It is, you know)
Are you still with me?
Is there room for me in your pew?

You say you want/need me
in your church;
will welcome me and mine
fight with/for my liberation
our liberation
Let's build a Kingdom, us all.

Do you know
how big my life is
how big my oppression
how big I am
Are you still with me?
Is there room in your pew
for me? [1]

What are we doing wrong? UFMCC has not seen the Third World basically because it's been blinded by the white of its life.

Another value brought with whites into UFMCC is the land-of-opportunity value. This says that all favors of a community should be earned and everyone has equal opportunity and equal access to the fruits. Because of this no direct outreach is done directly to Third World communities. They can find out about us just like everyone else. (The other side of this is, we don't want them to feel different.) And the lack of outreach leaves us with little Third World visibility, almost no Third World ministers, very few Third World leadership and none at levels of intense control -- policymaking or financial management.

The second reason for the lack of Third World people in UFMCC is basic blindness to Third World oppression, evidenced by UFMCC's lack of involvement in a liberation process for Third World people. This reason is less easy, more, virtually impossible for me to understand. It's hardest to understand when I think about UFMCC being born in 1968 when this country was wrought with racial unrest. The birth of UFMCC was preceeded by race riots and civil rights demonstrations.

In my most paranoid states, I think that it was no accident that the gay liberation movement reared its head when this nation was beginning to face the facts of racial situations. Sometimes I feel gay liberation to be yet another ploy to distract the people's attention away from the realities of racism. Sort of goes back to me first. But then there are Third World Lesbians and Gay men. Still it's hard to understnad how people with a Christian consciousness could build an institution which ignored the basic survival needs of another people especially when America's melting pot was boiling over from the pollution of racial oppression, when the stench of the realities of Third World existence was still fresh in our nostrils.

It amazes me even more when all of a sudden that same institution is jolted into the world by an issue like Cuban refugees and rally to the cause of starving, homeless Third World people in the name of Christian concern and obligation . . . and good public relations and press. It amazes me because in every city where there is an MCC Church, communities exist that are even more desolate than the Cuban situation. In every city where MCC churches are, there are hundreds, thousands of starving, homeless, struggling Third World people many of whom are Lesbians and Gay men, that UFMCC has ignored year after year of its existence. Even on the refugee issue it amazes me even more that there is no mention of the Haitian refugee situation which is occurring at the same time. The difference, they say, is that the Haitians are not political prisoners. The difference is that the Haitians are Black skinned people and this society has always been more open to the possible humanness of the fairer skinned foreigner.

Third World people do not come to UFMCC because UFMCC initiates no programs to meet their needs unless it's of the white liberal missionizing kind such as the Cuban refugee outreach. The second question I hear in response to my image of UFMCC is, what can we do? I remind you of my goal in this presentation to keep it simple. What we can do is simply follow Jesus. A Christian is one who follows Jesus Christ. We simply follow Jesus.

In his book, *Christ and Counter-Christ*, Carl Braaten [2] lists eight characteristics of Jesus Christ. I would like for us to look at them in light of race and the Gay/Lesbian Christian.

1) The demand for total change. Christ continually called for all who followed him to change their lives completely. A total change means for us to re-think and re-structure our values and racial attitudes in light of Christian teachings. A total change means deprogramming ourselves on ways of relating to each other.

2) The concept of the demonic. Jesus was aware of negative forces pulling against him. We, too, need to be aware of the demonic which shows itself in conditioning, attitudes of superiority, blindness to realities and concern only for our own survival.

3) The sign of the times. Jesus knew that the existing social conditions were only warnings of even more devastating horrors. We must not kid ourselves into believing that things will get better by and by if we just sit patiently and wait.

4) The urgency of the moment. Jesus knew that there was no time to be lukewarm. We, too, are faced with the urgency of change in the racial situation. Either we are for positive growth and change or we are against it.

5) Unconditional surrender. Jesus' life called for complete surrender, holding back nothing, holding onto nothing. As Christians, followers of Jesus the Christ, we, too, are called to let go of all comforts, our racial privilege, all racial illusions of power and grandeur, and surrender completely to God's will that we be united all in one Body, one Kingdom.

6) The sixth characteristic of Jesus is called the proletarian principle. The revolution which Jesus put into motion involved the working class, the proletariat and the dispossessed. It called for an end to the worship of money and riches as though they were gods. As Christians we, too, are called to abandon the worship of material goods. We are called to respond in revolutionary ways to the needs of all people and the destruction of the privileged class.

7) The reversal of roles. This characteristic Jesus revealed in saying such as the last shall be first and the first last. The white Lesbian and Gay Christian must be willing to do all he/she can to help facilitate the liberation of the Third World (sort of a Christian affirmative action program). Sometimes this will mean bending the rules

a little bit to provide Third World leadership; or providing unrestricted funds for Third World people to help themselves; or not imposing white values to the interpretation of Third World lifestyles.

8) The final characteristic of Jesus Christ is that the Christian experiences the birth pangs of a glorious future. The journey to racial harmony and Third World visibility does not carry with it an assurance of comfort. In fact, quite the contrary is true. To come face to face with the horrors of past and present realities of racial oppression is painful for all involved. I'm sure Jesus suffered much as the pain and suffering of the people became real and not just something he read about in the *Jerusalem Times*. As white Lesbian and Gay Christians realize the presence of Third World pain *plus* their own participation in the continuance of that pain, they will themselves experience utter pain. And the pain will increase with every privilege, every comfort whites have to surrender. However, as with the pain Jesus experienced, it is good and healthy to have happen. It is through these particular pains that we grow. It was through suffering and death that Jesus was given new life, a life through and in which we all live.

What to do? On the issue of race, the Lesbian/Gay Christian is called simply to follow Jesus, to re-think, re-structure, re-work all that we call us, to seriously involve ourselves in a total recommitment, total, radical change process expanding our love to truly embrace all people.

I am the them
and the those people
They are me
and I am them
I'm the one you worry 'bout
raping your sister
the one you take classes
to defend yourself against.
Are you still with me?
Is there room for me
in your pew?

1. Unpublished poem by Renee McCoy.
2. Braaten, Carl. *Christ and Counter-Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press) pp. 111-113.

More on Methodists

LAST ISSUE WE reported briefly on the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in April. Here, now, are more details:

From the start, the 9.7 million-member denomination's confab was pervaded by the issue of homosexuality. It came up the first night in an episcopal address, and it came up the next morning at a plenary session where a majority of delegates supported a motion to deal with the issue "at the earliest feasible time." It kept erupting throughout.

When it was finally over, the Conference had left the church's stance on homosexuality in approximately the same place it was four years ago:

* The phrase from the church's Social Principles would be retained: " . . . we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching."
* A new phrase would be added to the list of offenses for which a minister may be charged and removed: " . . . practices declared by the United Methodist Church to be incompatible with Christian teaching." That's so anti-gay forces can turn to the Social Principles as authority for removing homosexuals.
* Paragraph 906.13 in the Book of Discipline would remain, making the Council on Finance and Administration responsible for making sure that no United Methodist funds go to any gay caucus or get used to "promote the acceptance of homosexuality."
* The Social Principles affirmation that "all persons are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured" would not be amended to be more specific. Voted down was this change: "The United Methodist Church calls upon its agencies, boards, commissions and educational institutions at all levels to insure human and civil rights of all persons, including employees (remember Joan Clark?), regardless of sexual orientation."
* The process of examing and ordaining ministers wouldn't be changed so as to specifically prohibit the ordination and appointment of self-avowed, practicing homosexuals. As if that were necessary, given the linkage of the Social Principles statement and the process for removing ministers! Still, UMC's rightwing "Good News" folks wanted more, and the defeat of this one greatly vexed 'em. Actually, "Good News" lost on several fronts. They couldn't stop church support for ERA, a woman's freedom in the matter of abortion, and boycotts of J.P. Stevens and Nestle. They couldn't stop UMC from calling on the United States to apologize to Iran for its history of intervention in that nation's affairs, including the CIA-engineered overthrow of Iran's popular Mossedegh government in 1953.

NEW YORK -- In the wake of the 1980 General Conference, a UMC minister decided he'd try to rid the church of Paul Abels, pastor of Washington Square UMC in Greenwich Village. He wrote to New York Bishop W. Ralph Ward, accusing Abels of "immoral and un-Christian conduct," per the UMC Social Principles. Abels first publicly acknowledged his homosexuality in 1977, and it's been no secret since. The Conference's five-member Committee on Investigations found the literalistic use of Scripture in the accusation to be "inadequate" and said the charges lacked "reasonable grounds." So, Paul Abels will stay at the East Village church.

NASHVILLE -- The United Methodist Board of Discipleship has ruled that sex seminars for adults are all right, but that explicit sex films may not be owned, possessed or used by Methodist churches. Irritant in the controversy were films produced by Methodist minister Dr. Ted McIlvenna's National Sex Forum, whose films the Board of Discipleship had previously said were useful in counseling. McIlvenna, working with a cast of 10 unpaid volunteer couples, has made 64 films distributed to 8,000 customers, including the Federal Government. McIlvenna is associated with Glide Memorial United Methodist Church and the Institute for the Advanced Study of Human Sexuality, both in San Francisco. He produces 16-mm films and video cassettes, and predicts that churches that like them will continue using them anyway. In Nashville, the Board of Discipleship reports its 10 McIlvenna-produced films are "under lock and key."

Dutch church dumps Kuiper

WORCESTER, MA -- Johannes W. Kuiper, Interim Pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Worcester, was found guilty of "an offensive homosexual lifestyle" and was stripped of ministerial credentials by a tribunal of the (Dutch) Reformed Church in Columbia and Greene Counties, New York after a July trial.

The closed-door trial lasted almost 3½ hours and included testimony by three of Kuiper's four accusers -- two clergy and two laity. Kuiper responded with a reference to a 1979 Statement on Homosexuality of the Dutch church, which called for a ministry of love and outreach to the gay/lesbian community. He compared his accusers to the Pharisees of Jesus' day. Kuiper served for 10 years in the Dutch Reformed denomination and was in process of being credentialed by UFMCC. His requests for transfer of credentials have been denied by the Dutch Reformed Classis and led to the charges.

UCC: Guide on gays

NEW YORK -- "The church ordains persons, not categories." So reads a new "Study Guide on Ordination and Homosexuality" put out in October by the United Church of Christ. The 21-page guide was produced by the UCC Office of Church Life and Leadership in response to several local-level committees' requests.

It proposes five meetings for local ministry committees. In the first session, members listen to each others' views and feelings, completing a questionnaire about themselves and sharing the results. The next three explore biblical, medical-psychological, and legal-ethical issues. Then the final session has members devising the strategy they'll use should they receive an application for ordination from an openly gay or lesbian candidate. The national office has a suggestion about how to put such a strategy together, urging that "gay and lesbian persons be subject to the same understanding, procedures and criteria for ordination as would any candidate."

An ancient ministry:

Humanizing the hooker

HOWARD MOODY

Howard Moody is Senior Minister of Judson Memorial Church, New York, and a contributing editor of Christianity and Crisis. Judson is engaged in a ministry with prostitutes; a Mobile Unit, staffed by clergy and men and women from the Judson community, serves women on the streets as a "hospitality wagon" with legal, medical and social information. Hookers Hookup is Judson's journal for prostitutes. Last November, church administrator Arlene Carmen was arrested in a sweep of prostitutes. When she did not dissociate herself from the prostitutes as a "decent woman" she was mistaken for a prostitute herself and jailed for 21 hours -- thus learning first-hand the treatment of prostitutes by police. Judson is seeking changes in city laws concerning loitering and prostitution. In this sermon, Moody interprets Judson's Prostitution Project.

FROM TIME TO time it is fitting and necessary that the ministry and work that we do be interpreted to ourselves and for the larger community. For some three years now, without publicity, Arlene Carmen and several women from Judson Church have been contacting and cultivating friendships with a number of prostitutes in massage parlors and on the streets, mostly on Eighth Avenue in the Times Square district -- getting to know them, trying to break through all the blocks our conditioning set before us to understand their work, to experience the drudgery and danger of their existence, sharing the fears and phobias of a life lived in the underworld of illicit sex -- and all of this against incredible resistance of being seen as a cop, or distrusted as a "do-gooder" or perhaps even worse, a "missionary." The work required an amazing amount of patience and persistence. It was frustrating to do nothing but be there with the women of the streets. Everybody was doing something to or for the women -- the cops were chasing and hassling them; the tricks were buying their services; the black lady minister who cooked hot meals was feeding them; reformers were trying to get them out of the life; and others were trying to

save their souls. Even the neighborhood people were castigating them; but our work was just being there, standing by, listening, learning about their lives and their work.

Our work became public only several weeks ago when, as a result of Arlene Carmen's arrest in a sweep of prostitutes, a suit against the city in her behalf was announced by the New York Civil Liberties Union. Since then many queries and comments (some of them unrepeatable) have come to me about this ministry, and I want to suggest why I believe this work with psostitutes to be theologically appropriate and ecclesiastically necessary.

Our faith teaches us, and it has the audacity to call it "good news," that every individual human life is precious in God's sight -- every member of the human family is a child of God endowed with spiritual dignity and human worth regardless of where they are, or what their sex life is like, or how they make a living. Now that's a very ancient fact of faith but religious people were never very good at grasping that truth. Jesus had a great deal of trouble in his ministry making his followers and his religious folk understand. They thought only those who prayed a certain way or belonged to temples or who studied scripture were God's children. And Jesus kept reminding them that God's compassion and concern was for people that they never even spoke to.

Jesus was always shocking them by telling them that tax-collectors, and prostitutes, and women taken in adultery, and drunkards would go into the kingdom before you who think you know who God loves and has chosen for his examples of goodness in the world. Those who were nothing, the least and despised of the earth they will be first.

The Church took shape and grew out of the Master's life and teaching. It was a minority religion, made up of the lower class riff-raff of a captive people in the great Roman empire. It was always from its beginning in the prophetic faith of the Hebrew people a champion of the underdog, spreading its healing balm over the sores of people wounded by their society, censuring the rich and the powerful for the infliction of those wounds on the poor outcast of the nation; calling for a redress of the grievances for those whose cries of hurts reached to the temple of religion and of business.

The church in history always lost its power to judge and discern when it consorted with the power of the state in society and wanted to keep company with the right people; embraced the cultural norms in flagrant denial of its transcendent values; and sold its spiritual birthright for a mess of societal acceptance. The Church has no reason to expect that it will fare any better than the Master did.

For this Church our work with prostitutes is within a line of ministries that has been carried on for the last thirty years. In the 1950s the scapegoats of this community and others in the city were people called "juvenile delinquents" -- they were blamed for everything wrong that happened. We gave them sanctuary, furnished them with social clubs, defended them when the police harassed and hassled them -- they weren't the children of this congregation; they were tough, sometimes violent, troubled Italian-American teenagers. In the late fifties this Church worked with heroin addicts -- fought for their humanization, and picketed for hospital beds so they could be treated as patients rather than criminals. In the 60s we befriended and stood with blacks and hippies and people who hated the war. These were not "our people" or neighbors but we learned from their lives and their struggle. In the late 60s it was women being criminalized for getting an abortion. We identified with them, supported them and conspired with them to break the law in order that they might exercise the God-given right of freedom of choice.

Our work with prostitutes is in line with our historical role as a people. I am glad we're there and I am deeply grateful to Arlene and the other women who led us into this prophetic/priestly function of this congregation.

Now I want to respond to some of the questions and comments about this controversial work as the larger public (and, perhaps some of you) see it. Someone said to me why are you defending those prostitutes on the streets where our children have to see them and hear them. The other day an irate phone caller from the Clinton neighborhood exclaimed to our secretary that any liberal minister who talked like I did probably lived in a big house in Westchester and didn't know what it was like where he was. Well, he was dead wrong. I live on East Eighteenth Street and both of my children grew up there, and there were always hookers on the corner of Third Avenue and Fourteenth Street. I want to tell you that no prostitute ever brought harm to my son but he has been mugged and beaten up three different times in other parts of the city where there were no prostitutes, and I deeply resent the violence done to him. Yet only prejudiced and convoluted logic can blame the hooker for that. That same logic arrives at priority that making Times Square "morally respectable" is more important than preventing violent crimes against people and property in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant or the mugging of elderly people in the South Bronx and Sheepshead Bay.

Another person said to me that prostitutes talk filthy and make obscene gestures and give the neighborhood a bad name, so why am I willing to tolerate that. I thought to myself if the courts can agree (and I don't disagree) that the Nazis can march in the Jewish suburb of Skokie, Illinois, where 10,000 holocaust victims live, in the name of free speech, while they spout the most offensive obscenities against the survivors of the "death camps" where they will be protected by cordons of police, how can we defend laws in society that prosecute, harass and imprison women who stand on the street and say "Do you want to go out?"

I will tell you why I think people can support the outrageous inconsistency and injustice of that judgement. It is because they have already dehumanized, depersonalized and stereotyped the prostitutes into an inhuman category. That's only overcome when you know Michele and Sherre, and Diane and Kitty and Pat. Only when stereotypes have names and troubles and worries and fears, and sometimes joys, do we grant them humanity. Most people don't want to know their names or anything about their inner lives, but those of us who claim the name of our Master have a mandate. And in this ministry we are trying to follow it.

You may ask why this sermon was not more balanced, and didn't consider all the real problems of the mayor, the Forty-second Street Redevelopment Corporation, and the people who are living in the neighborhood where prostitutes are. The reason is that all the powers that be are on their side and almost all of the churches are, too. So you will forgive this modest one-sided attempt to redress the balance. It is my hope that our work may coalesce, make visible, and human, a persecuted minority. The street prostitute is fast becoming the "nigger" and "pinko-faggot" of the Seventies, and the only crime they are being jailed for is bartering their sexual services to satisfy the unfulfilled sexual desires and fantasies of our husbands, brothers and sons in this society.

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